

VZCZCXYZ0008
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHAM #2697/01 1760938
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 250938Z JUN 07
FM AMEMBASSY AMMAN
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9220
INFO RUEHGB/AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD PRIORITY 5220
RUEHLB/AMEMBASSY BEIRUT PRIORITY 2641
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA PRIORITY 0020
RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO PRIORITY 3236
RUEHDM/AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS PRIORITY 3622
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PRIORITY 0202
RUEHSG/AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO PRIORITY 0011
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV PRIORITY 0644
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM PRIORITY 4507
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 0601

C O N F I D E N T I A L AMMAN 002697

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR NEA AND PRM

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/25/2017
TAGS: [PREF](#) [KPAL](#) [PREL](#) [IS](#) [KWBG](#) [JO](#) [IZ](#) [LE](#)
SUBJECT: UNRWA ADVISORY COMMISSION MEETING READOUT

Classified By: Ambassador David Hale for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (SBU) Summary: UNRWA's Advisory Commission met June 17-18 at the Dead Sea in Jordan. Representatives from over 20 refugee host and UNRWA donor countries and senior UNRWA staff participated in the meeting. PRM/ANE Office Director Richard Albright accompanied by Acting Regional RefCoord and other PRM staff represented the U.S. On the margins of the meeting, the U.S. delegation discussed the humanitarian situation in Gaza, Lebanon, and of Palestinians in Iraq. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) In her presentation to the AdCom, UNRWA Commissioner General Karen AbuZayd stressed the value of the Advisory Commission and the importance of the relationship between UNRWA and host and donor countries, particularly during this time of political upheaval in the region. AbuZayd emphasized the increased demand for UNRWA services, and noted that many Palestinian refugee families are seeking services for the first time after decades of self-sufficiency due to deteriorating socio-economic conditions, particularly in the West Bank and Gaza. The AdCom remembered UNRWA staff members who have recently been killed in the line of duty in Gaza and Lebanon, and commended the ongoing dedication of UNRWA staff working in difficult conditions.

- - - - -
Lebanon Camps Update
- - - - -

¶3. (SBU) UNRWA's Lebanon Field Director Richard Cook provided an update on the situation in Nahr El Bared (NEB - note this was prior to the culmination of hostilities in the camp) and Beddawi Camps in northern Lebanon. More than 25,000 Palestinians refugees have fled NEB as a result of the ongoing fighting between Fatah al Islam militants and the Lebanese army. The majority of refugees have fled to the nearby Beddawi camp where they are sheltering with relatives or in UNRWA schools and other installations. Cook remarked that the number of refugees who have registered with UNRWA in Beddawi (over 30,000) actually exceeds the estimated the number of those who have fled. Cook postulated that the discrepancy is likely due to the fact that many squatters on the outskirts of NEB are coming to Beddawi to flee the fighting and seek assistance. Cook estimated that the number of refugees remaining in NEB was as low as 1,500-3,000 Palestinians.

¶4. (SBU) Cook underscored that it remains impossible to gain an accurate picture of the damage inside the camp or predict what the reconstruction needs will be. He remarked that many of UNRWA's installations are located in the areas most affected by fighting, and believes that a significant number of refugee shelters have been destroyed. The Government of Lebanon has already contracted a firm to conduct an extensive needs assessment inside NEB once the fighting has stopped. Cook underscored the GOL's expectation that the needs assessment and ultimate rebuilding of NEB will be paid for by the international community.

¶5. (C) In a meeting between the U.S. delegation and Richard Cook on the margins of AdCom, Cook reported that GOL-UNRWA cooperation on the Camp Improvement Initiative is ongoing, and that the international community has already pledged \$24 million for this initiative. Cook was pessimistic about the prospect of change in the employment laws for Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, and discussed creative ways to address the problem of under-employment of this population, including a project envisioning bringing refugees to various Gulf states for vocational training and subsequent employment.

UNRWA Fully Operational in Gaza

¶6. (SBU) Although UNRWA Gaza Field Director John Ging remained in Gaza in lieu of attending the AdCom meeting, his remarks were delivered by an UNRWA staff member. Ging lamented the previous week's violence in Gaza and noted that over 100 Palestinians were killed and over 500 wounded. He paid tribute to the courage of UNRWA staff in Gaza, and remembered the two UNRWA staff members killed and two injured in the cross-fire. Ging commented that Palestinians in Gaza were feeling a mix of relief about the end of violence and extreme apprehension about the future. He implored the international community to consider making policy decisions on the basis of "real human needs," and remarked that without tangible improvements on the ground, further despair and violence would likely result. Ging also announced that UNRWA, which partially suspended operations after its two staff members were killed, had resumed full operations in Gaza. Finally, he thanked donors for their continued support of UNRWA's operations.

UNRWA's West Bank and Jordan Field Directors Report

¶7. (SBU) UNRWA's Jordan Field Director Sheldon Pitterman and new West Bank Deputy Field Director Barbara Shenstone also delivered statements to the AdCom; the Agency's Syria Field Director was unable to attend the meeting. Pitterman's remarks centered on the need for increased funding for UNRWA's operations in Jordan in order to improve facilities and services. He reviewed the current challenges facing UNRWA in Jordan, including dilapidated facilities, widespread double-shifting in schools, and high doctor-to-patient ratios in clinics. Despite these challenges, Pitterman proudly announced that the students in UNRWA's schools consistently outrank students in both government and private schools in Jordan. Pitterman thanked the United States and Germany for pledging to earmark funding to UNRWA's General Fund for the rehabilitation of several UNRWA schools and clinics.

¶8. (SBU) Barbara Shenstone focused her remarks on the impact of the closure regime in the West Bank on the Palestinian population, as well as on UNRWA's operations. Shenstone used statistics compiled by UN OCHA to illustrate the "cantonization" of the West Bank. She remarked that UNRWA has two major concerns about the impact of the various GOI policies on its operations: plans to mechanize access into and out of internal and external crossing points, and the requirement that humanitarian organizations limit delivery of supplies to two crossing points into the West

Bank using a back-to-back system. Shenstone pointed out that the mechanized access system "will not recognize" UN Identification Cards, which could significantly impact the movement of humanitarian workers. Shenstone asked donors to register "strong protests" about the non-recognition of UN ID cards, as well as about various GOI policies impacting humanitarian assistance operations.

Advisory Commission's Recommendations to UNRWA

¶9. (SBU) Both AbuZayd and the AdCom Chairperson commented on the sheer volume of work completed since the last session (held in February 2007), particularly noting UNRWA's development of a draft program strategy linked to its 2008-2009 biennium budget and resource mobilization strategy, as well as progress in the implementation of recommendations made by the Board of Auditors, the Organizational Development Plan, and in the external review of emergency operations. In addition to strongly commending UNRWA's progress in implementing recommendations at its last meeting, this AdCom adopted further recommendations to UNRWA in each of the aforementioned areas. Main recommendations emphasized by the U.S. delegation and ultimately adopted by the Commission included: further development of performance measures and program indicators; an increased link between UNRWA's strategic prioritization and the budget development process; and continued implementation of Board of Auditors' and other recommendations related to financial management.

Attempted Canadian Revival of a Multilateral Coordination
Body Focused on Refugees

¶10. (SBU) The Government of Canada made a presentation on the Canadian-organized Refugee Coordination Forum for Palestine Refugees. Although there were some expressions of support for this initiative, multiple delegations including hosts and donors expressed concern about the potential for this forum to duplicate the efforts of the AdCom. Refugee host countries also expressed concern about establishing a group focused on political issues relating to Palestinian refugees outside the framework of an actual peace process. The GOC emphasized that this group is nascent and still working to develop its primary goals.

PLO-DORA and US Delegation Discuss Palestinians from Iraq

¶11. (C) In a meeting on the margins of the AdCom with Mohammed Abu Bakr, Director of PLO-Department of Palestinian Affairs (DORA) for Jordan, the U.S. delegation discussed issues relevant to Palestinians from Iraq. Albright pointed out that the PLO's official position vis--vis exploring durable solutions for this population is somewhat ambiguous, referring to reports that the PLO "Ambassadors" in Chile and Brazil appealed to the respective governments not to accept Palestinians from Iraq for resettlement. In the case of Chile, the PLO's intervention caused a reversal of an initial decision to resettle about 100 Palestinians from Iraq, whereas Brazil is still planning to accept the remaining caseload (approximately 100) of Palestinians from Iraq currently residing in UNHCR's Ruweished Camp in Jordan. Abu Bakr reiterated previous assertions that President Abbas has made to him privately that he does not oppose resettlement and that "any solution for this population is acceptable."

¶12. (C) Albright noted that according to UNHCR, the number of Palestinians in Baghdad has decreased significantly over the past several months, and asked Abu Bakr to speculate as to where the bulk of this population has gone. Abu Bakr suggested that many of the Palestinians from Iraq, using

false Iraqi passports, have slipped into Syria unnoticed or perhaps officially overlooked.

¶13. (U) PRM/ANE Office Director Richard Albright did not have a chance to clear on this cable.
Hale